

Record High Heating Prices Predicted this Winter

WASHINGTON, September 26 - About \$2.3 million will be released to Vermont to help people cope with rising fuel prices, the Vermont congressional delegation - Senators Bernie Sanders and Patrick Leahy and Representative Peter Welch - announced today.

The \$2.3 million is Vermont's share of \$131 million in emergency heating assistance to be distributed nationwide, White House Budget Director Jim Nussle told Sanders. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP, provides a critical safety net for thousands of senior citizens on fixed incomes and low-income Vermont families with children.

The release of the funds comes amid reports that consumers will likely pay record prices to heat their homes this winter, with a particularly big jump expected in heating oil bills. The average U.S. heating oil bill is expected to be a record \$1,834 for the winter, up 28 percent from a year ago and double the cost seen four winters ago. Average prices are expected to top \$3 a gallon, up from \$2.48 last winter, according to the [National Energy Assistance Directors' Association](#).

Sanders said, "I am delighted that the federal government will be providing about \$2.3 million in emergency heating assistance to Vermont. While that's the good news, the bad news is that the president has threatened to veto funds for next year unless Congress accepts deep cuts in the low-income heating assistance program. This program must be strengthened, not weakened, especially at a time when record-breaking heating-oil prices are expected this winter. In the richest country on the face of the earth, we must ensure that no one goes cold this winter."

Leahy said, "It will be a long, cold winter for thousands of working Vermont families if they cannot afford the heat they need for their homes. Record hikes in heating costs already are setting many families back. These advance LIHEAP funds will allow Vermont to plan more efficiently and improve program management, and that will help stretch these funds to make them go farther. It also primes the pump to help ensure timely release of this help to low-income families and seniors who cannot afford to wait."

Vermont Delegation Announces Heating Assistance

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Welch said, "With the skyrocketing cost of heating fuel this winter, Vermonters will need more help than ever. We cannot allow an unmanageable oil bill to cause one of our neighbors to go cold this winter. As I did in the State Senate, I will continue to fight for the strongest heating assistance program possible for those in need."

Leahy and Sanders were among 52 senators who wrote to President Bush on September 11 urging him to release the \$131 million in contingency funds saying, "a significant need still exists across the nation for additional home energy assistance to help families and seniors meet rising arrears and shut-off notices."

Welch joined 111 members of the House to urge the president to immediately release \$151.5 million in the LIHEAP contingency fund in a letter on September 13.